

Kelley Coffman-Lee: Children left in hot cars

Posted: 06/15/2012 11:33:19 AM MDT KELLEY COFFMAN-LEE, *Centennial*

Currently in the state of Colorado there is no law prohibiting leaving a baby alone in her car seat while Mom runs into the liquor store, the library or the mall. In fact, you can even leave your infant in her car seat on a sweltering, sun-drenched Colorado afternoon with just one window cracked a mere three inches. Last week these lawful and police officer-approved horrors were brought to my attention after I pulled into a parking space at my local library. In the car next to mine were three young children -- one just a baby in his car seat -- left entirely alone in a hot car, Mom nowhere in sight. This struck me as simply deplorable behavior by a parent, and quite frankly abusive. I called 911. The mother came back out to her child-filled car before the police officer arrived and spent the time waiting for him by complaining about how hot it was and that she had to wait in the sun. Oddly enough, she did not sit in her closed vehicle with the slightly cracked window. The officer who eventually arrived on this child welfare call had this to say to me after I gave him the details, "It's not illegal to leave children in a car." Apparently parental convenience trumps parental responsibility in our state.

According to the Colorado Department of Human Services "Colorado in general has accepted the age of 12 years as a guideline for when it might be appropriate for a child to be left alone for short periods of time." This guideline is referring to leaving your child alone in the safety of your home -- when he's practically a teenager. It should be common sense that leaving a baby alone in a sweltering 2-ton machine parked unlocked in a public lot is just, well, stupid. And it should be illegal. The officer told me it was the length of time the children were left alone, primarily, that made the difference. I wonder how honest Mom was when responding to the question of how long she had abandoned her young children. The officer said he also must take into account the "maturity" of the oldest child left alone in the car and whether or not he would be able to respond to an emergency. Well, the child "in charge" had just graduated from 1st grade. That means a 7-year-old was babysitting a toddler and a baby in a vehicle abandoned by the parent for an indeterminate length of time in an enclosure that was getting warmer by the minute. The officer deemed this was all fine and good -- and don't forget legal -- and sent Mom on her way.

According to KidsAndCars.org, an organization that has documented over 2,450 vehicle-related child deaths in the U.S. in an attempt to alert the public to this growing public safety issue threatening our kids, between 2001 and 2010 there were 6,627 incidents involving children left alone in vehicles, resulting in 2,137 child fatalities. In Colorado alone from 1990 to 2010 there were 6 reported child vehicular heat stroke fatalities, 9 child frontover fatalities, 17 child backover fatalities, and 41 child nontraffic fatalities. Children left alone in cars can fall victim to carbon monoxide poisoning, falls from cars, seat belt strangulation, trunk entrapment, kidnapping, power window strangulation, motor vehicle fires, vehicle set in motion accidents, and they can find themselves unintended castaways during a car theft.

It's time to ensure that recklessly leaving young children and babies alone in cars is made illegal in the state of Colorado. So when I approach you with my petition this summer to introduce a bill prohibiting parents from leaving their children alone in vehicles, please do the sensible thing and sign it. The village must step up and protect the children from the village idiots who are leaving their kids out for the wolves and the badge-endowed enablers who are flippantly and robotically quipping, "It's legal."

And please remember: On average 38 children die heat-related deaths after being left alone in hot cars every year. Never leave them alone in the [car...even](#) for a minute.

http://www.dailycamera.com/letters/ci_20865872/kelley-coffman-lee-children-left-hot-cars